

Yin Fu loved his bagua needles (a pair of double pointed rods seven inches long with a pivoting ring about two-thirds from the tip). Chung Ting Hua literally died with his double elbow knives in his hands; shot by German troops during the Boxer Rebellion.

But the weapon duo historically trained only in the bagua zhang style is the deer hook swords. These were the favorite weapons of Dung Hei Chuan (1797-1882), the creator of bagua zhang, whose reputation for close-range "churning, slicing and dicing" techniques was untouchable. Whether or not he created this art or was the first to reveal it is still being argued. Legend says that, confronted by a gang of bandits, he killed 12 of them with these blades even though they were armed with carbide and spears. Least you dismiss this as pure fiction, remember that some caravans escaped plunder by merely displaying his flag, warning everyone around that they were under his protection.

As an extension of the fist, deer hook swords are almost impossible to disarm.

Deer Hook Swords

Bagua's Deadly Duo

BY LEWIS PALEIAS





*Deflect
down-
ward and
smash.*

Deer Hook Swords



↑ **EMBRACE THE MOON AT THE CHEST.** Stand with both hands hanging down at your sides (1). Move your left foot out to the side about shoulder width and then slowly raise the swords in front of you (2). Extend both swords to the sides and turn slightly to your right (3). Keep lifting the hands (palm up) until shoulder height (4).

← **GREEN DRAGON TURNS ITS BODY.** While turning toward the left, lower your arms, crossing and compressing them in front of your chest: the left hand is palm down and the lower right hand is palm up (5). **CIRCLE WALKING.** Step forward and right with your right leg while swinging the right sword horizontally to your right (6). Walk seven steps clockwise around the circle (7-8).

A Weapon By Any Name

Originally called "Sun & Moon, Heaven & Earth Swords," (ri yue qian kun jian) they became most commonly known as deer hook swords (lu jiao dao), because the weapons are shaped like a deer's antlers. They are also called crescent moon swords and Mandarin duck axes, since they are used together and, like a mated pair of Mandarin ducks, are inseparable.

It is said that the deer hook swords were specially designed to defeat the straight sword and disarm the opponent. Each weapon can stab, slash, thrust and cut from all sides. As one blade hooks and traps, the other counterattacks. Unlike other weapons that are extensions of the waist, shoulder or entire body, these weapons are designed to be extensions of the fist. Like giant push daggers, they are virtually impossible to disarm.

Combining the weapons' techniques with the twisting and whipping movements of bagua gives an opponent the appearance of walking into a Warring blender. Basic techniques are included in these 16 words: hooking, sliding, seizing, controlling, pulling, cutting, picking, smashing, paring, drilling, chopping, mincing, brushing, smearing, leading, carrying, and neutralizing.

Size Matters

Deer hook swords vary greatly in size. The largest pair I've had the pleasure of playing with (much to the owner's chagrin) was an ancient set over



1
EMBRACE THE MOON AT THE CHEST. Blue Jams white's press (1). Blue lifts his arms, catching white's wrist and stabbing the upper arm (2).



2

two feet long and weighing about five pounds each. I've been told of small pairs designed to hide in the long, wide sleeves of the traditional Mandarin garment. The wielder could wade through crowds, slicing and dicing right through the sleeves. Although some sets have only three blades, the majority have four. This extra point allows for more stabbing, hooking and, most importantly, chin na — or the ability to lock and disarm an opponent's weapon.

Why Weapons?

Why bother to learn a weapon form? Or more specifically, the deer hook weapon form? Many claim that the internal arts are devoid of weight training. Some even claim that it even retards qi development. But nothing could be further from the truth. For example, pick up a tai chi sword or lift your saber. Try holding a spear straight out. Heavy, isn't it? Weapons forms constitute the weight training segment of internal arts. While doing barehand forms, most practitioners extend their qi past their skin and feel the energy tingling to the hairs on their body.

With weapons you must extend your qi to the very tip of the blade. What an incredible rush! The added weight and length greatly increase strength, cardiovascular health, balance and spatial sense while in motion. But, unlike most other weapons, deer hooks weight both hands simultaneously, equally building and balancing muscle, tendons and other connective tissue.

The constant stimulation of the three yin channels in the hands: Lung, Heart and Pericardium, supported by bagua's continuous pumping of Kidney's Bubbling Well point in the feet (let alone the waist twisting that massages the Liver and Spleen), exerts health benefits far greater than any other means discovered.

Unlike some sword/saber techniques, these weapons don't allow you to just "hide" the empty hand or use it only for balance. You learn to become

"The deer hook swords were specially designed to defeat the straight sword and disarm the opponent."

Deflect upward and slash.



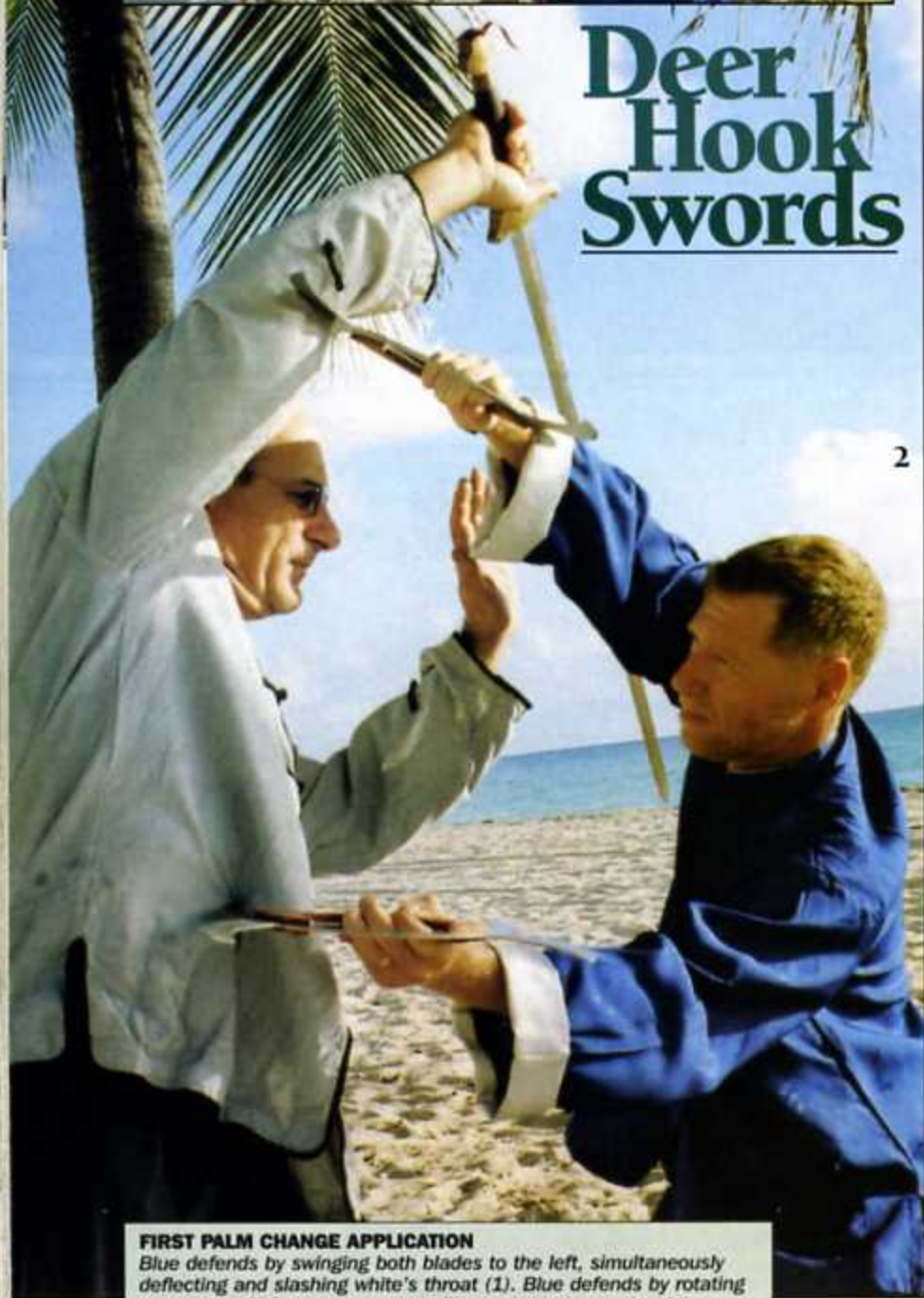
↑ **FIRST PALM CHANGE** For the eighth step, bring your left foot up even with your right, so you end up pigeon-toed and in the same spot you started (9). Circle both swords to your left (10), open up your stance, squat down, rotate the swords 180 degrees and swing both swords to your right (11).

↓ **GREEN DRAGON TURNS ITS BODY.** Shift your weight to your left leg while circling both swords clockwise; left (palm down) over right (palm up (12)). Step forward with your right foot and horizontally swing both swords to your right (13). End by moving your right foot back a shoulder-width from your left (14) and circle the swords back to embrace the moon at chest posture (15). Lower your hands to your sides (16).





Deer Hook Swords



FIRST PALM CHANGE APPLICATION

Blue defends by swinging both blades to the left, simultaneously deflecting and slashing white's throat (1). Blue defends by rotating the blades 180 degrees and circling both blades to the right, slicing the arm and hooking the abdomen (2).

an ambidextrous fighter by actively and simultaneously attacking and defending with both hands. You also learn intense focus and precision; eight blades coiling through your armpits do not allow for sloppy forms. Equally important, as (heavy) extensions of your fist, the deer hook set greatly increases your strength and punching power, something no other weapon does as admirably. To top it off, some of your best bare hand fighting techniques will come out of the deer hook form.

Rare Finds

You can order deer hooks from most martial arts importers. The majority are made from chromed steel, as opposed to stainless steel combat blades. They usually come in four points (although sometimes three) equal-sized crescents, though I have seen some with different-sized interlocking crescents. I greatly prefer the latter since they have longer blades in front and allow the weapon to lock and disarm an opponent's weapon. If you are buying them just for practice, then this consideration doesn't carry as much weight as the weight of the weapon itself. The average weight is about three-fourths-to-one-and-a-half pounds each. The chromed steel pairs cannot be sharpened, but cost much less.

Finding combat steel deer hooks for purchase are rare. The weapons I hand make for my students are stainless steel with interlocking crescents of 12 1/2-inch and ten-inch diameters. This allows plenty of arcs to easily trap any weapon, while extending four seven-inch blades, just like a dragon's claw. South American hardwood handles complete these deadly beauties.

After years of development, there are presently more than 20 different styles of bagua zhang known to us. Steeped in Daoist wisdom and the search for immortality, this art can be a lifetime endeavor. By being humble and ready to absorb knowledge from many different sources, you can increase your understanding of this profound Chinese internal martial art. Regardless of your goals, the spiritual, physical and practical fighting aspects of bagua zhang are second to none. And you won't find a stranger set of weapons this side of "Star Trek." ☯

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